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Emperors, Frontiers and Foreign Relations, 31 B.C. to A.D. 378*

By FERGUS MILLAR

1. *Introduction*

'SEVERUS . . . was in the habit of saying that he had gained a large additional territory and made it a bulwark for Syria. But the facts themselves show that it is a source of continual wars for us, and of great expenses. For it provides very little revenue and involves very great expenditure; and having extended our frontiers to the neighbours of the Medes and Parthians, we are constantly so to speak at war in their defence.' So writes Cassius Dio about the extension of the Eastern frontier in the 190s and the creation of the provinces of Mesopotamia and Osrhoene.[1] The significance of the passage however, extends beyond the question of the Eastern frontier itself at that moment. Written by an ex-consul, and former *assessor* of Severus, it reveals two types of justification for conquest uttered by the Emperor himself – one straightforwardly imperialistic, the other strategic; and a critique of this from two points of view, the balance of income and expenditure, and the wider strategic commitments incurred. Whether Dio had formulated such views already in Severus' reign we cannot know; this section of his History will have been written at the earliest towards 220, and probably later.[2] If he had, we have no reason to think that he expressed them to Severus. If he did, it can only have been after the event, for his own narrative at this point makes clear that the new province of Mesopotamia was entrusted to an *eques*, and an 'honour' (the status of *colonia*) given to Nisibis, either after the campaign of 195, or (less probably) after that of 198, in neither of which Dio himself took part.[3] None the less, the fact that the passage retails both the authentic views of an Emperor and a critique of them by a *consularis* may encourage us to ask some general questions: how, by whom and within what conceptual frameworks were the foreign and frontier 'policies' of the Empire formulated?

We need not doubt the importance of such problems. On the one hand the results of these policies had fundamental effects on the political, social and cultural contexts within which millions of people lived, from the lamplighters of Oxyrhynchus taking their oath by 'Caesar' in 30/29 B.C.;[4] to the people of Dura who found Roman troops established in their city in the late second century and then saw it destroyed by the Persians in the 250s; or (in Ammianus'

* Earlier versions of this paper were given at the universities of Berlin, Bielefeld, Bochum and Köln in July 1979 and at Miss J. M. Reynolds's and Mr M. H. Crawford's seminar in Cambridge in October 1979. I am grateful for comments and suggestions to Sir Ronald Syme, Professor A. L. F. Rivet and Professor J. J. Wilkes.

[1] Dio lxxv, 3, 2–3 (Boissevain iii, p. 340).

[2] For an early chronology – probably too early – of the composition of the *Roman History* see F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (1964), ch. 2 and pp. 193–4.

[3] Dio. loc. cit. (note 1); Nisibis as a *colonia*: Dio xxxvi, 6, 2. For the background see M. G. Angeli Bertinelli, 'I Romani oltre l'Eufrate nel II secolo d. C (le province di Assiria, di Mesopotamia e di Osroene)', *ANRW* II. 9. I (1976), 3; cf. D. L. Kennedy, 'Ti. Claudius Subatianus Aquila, "First Prefect of Mesopotamia" ', *ZPE* xxxvi (1979), 255. The exact date of the creation of the two provinces cannot be determined.

[4] *P. Oxy.* 1453 = Hunt and Edgar, *Select Papyri* II, no. 327.

marvellous description) the inhabitants of Nisibis evacuating the city in 363 under the terms of Jovian's treaty with Shapur II.[5] On the other hand the problems involve the extent of the geographical and ethnographical knowledge available to the Emperors and their advisers; the nature of the conceptual framework which they could apply to this knowledge; and their conception of the Empire itself – either (to put it at its simplest) as an offensive system designed for further conquests, or as an essentially static defensive system. Then there are more specific and concrete, but equally fundamental questions. Was (for instance) a map of the German or Tripolitanian *limes*, or of northern Britain available in Rome, or wherever the Emperor was? In either case how, with what delays and in what form did short-term information reach the Emperor or whoever made decisions on frontier questions? Who indeed was involved in such decisions, and what difference did it make whether at the relevant moment the Emperor was in Rome, in a province or on campaign elsewhere?

These questions are of course prompted by E. N. Luttwak's excellent *Grand Strategy*,[6] whose approach is to analyse the actual dispositions of troops and frontier installations at successive periods, and to deduce from them the nature and intentions of the current imperial strategy. It remains possible, however, to doubt whether all the successive phases actually answer to Luttwak's analyses, and to wonder whether indeed there was a 'grand strategy', rather than a series of positions arrived at by *ad hoc* decisions.[7] It is therefore all the more important to ask whether we can know how the Emperors or others could or did acquire information, form views and formulate decisions in these areas. It may be of course that we cannot. As Dio himself observed in a famous passage, under the Empire decisions were taken in secret, and what was given out was often untrue, or at least unverifiable.[8] But Imperial *civil* decisions did at least produce a vast series of written pronouncements, letters and verdicts, preserved in literary and legal sources and on papyri and inscriptions, which are not merely products of the Imperial entourage, but which cannot be falsified (unless proved to be inauthentic) because they are performative utterances which embody rather than report Imperial actions. By contrast, whereas we know that there was correspondence between Emperors and their *legati* on matters of frontier policy, no texts of such letters survive. There were also letters between Emperors and kings, but our only texts of these are offered by literary sources of the fourth century (the letter of Constantine to Shapur II, and Shapur's exchange of letters with Constantius in 358), and are of uncertain authenticity.[9] Comparable problems arise with Imperial pronouncements which are certainly authentic, the *Res Gestae* of Augustus or Julian's *Letter to the Athenians*,[10] but which contain retrospective reports, justifications or celebrations of military or diplomatic policy. Like the victory titles of Emperors, or their coins, columns or arches, these pronouncements will tell us what was claimed, while leaving us without even the certainty that the claim was not justified. The difficulty in knowing simply 'what happened' is illustrated dramatically, for instance, by the total contradiction between Graeco-Roman narrative sources on the death of Gordian III and the ending of the Persian campaigns under Philip, and our only external document on Imperial campaigns,

[5] Ammianus xxv, 9.

[6] E. N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third* (1976).

[7] So J. C. Mann, 'Power, Force and the Frontiers of the Empire', *JRS* lxix (1979), 175. Note also idem, 'The Frontiers of the Principate', *ANRW* ii, 1 (1974), 508.

[8] Dio liii, 19.

[9] Constantine: Eusebius, *VC* iv, 9–13. Eusebius (iv, 8) attests the preservation of a copy of the Latin original in Constantine's own hand (φέρεται μὲν οὖν Ῥωμαΐᾳ γλώττῃ παρ' αὐτοῖς ἡμῖν καὶ τοῦτο τὸ βασιλέως ἰδιόγραφον γράμμα), which he reproduces in Greek. See H. Dörries, *Das Selbstzeugnis Kaiser Konstantins* (1954), 48–9; 125–7. Shapur and Constantius: Ammianus xvii, 5.

[10] Julian 268A–287D.

the so-called *Res Gestae* of Shapur I from Naqsh-i-Rustam.[11] None the less, even the most blatant of propaganda will tell us what someone wished to be believed, and will by implication reveal something of the values, objectives and presuppositions both of its author and of its intended audience. As the passage of Dio shows, it does not follow that contemporary observers assented to the claims made in propaganda. But the overall pattern of propaganda must still tell us something of the conceptual framework within which policy was formulated.

The same applies to what must, for lack of anything better, remain our main source of evidence, the historical narratives, letters and biographies of the period. Some of these at least, for instance the works of the two Plinies, Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio and Ammianus, come from precisely the class of men who were called to the Emperor's *consilium*, acted as his secretaries or served on his staff. Have we any reason to suppose that even those Emperors (remarkably few) who were brought up and trained as such could have acquired a conception of frontier or foreign policy which was significantly different from theirs? Even if that could be shown, many of the Emperors who played the most important parts in military history – for instance Vespasian, Trajan, Septimius Severus, Aurelian, Diocletian and Valentinian – came to the throne in middle life, from the Senate or from equestrian posts. Chance or circumstance could have brought Tacitus, Dio or Ammianus to the throne just as well as Trajan, Severus or Valentinian. We would be quite wrong to *assume* that Imperial policy was informed by reasoning which was superior or different in kind from that of those who recorded it in historical narratives.

A superiority of immediate concrete information – in the form of messages from the frontiers – on the Emperor's part might well be supposed. But even here his dependence on his social and cultural environment is manifest, for new information could come to him from three main sources: missions sent by him across the frontiers to explore and report back; reports from governors (men, once again, like Tacitus, Agricola, Pliny the Younger or Dio) or the arrival of foreign envoys. In all these cases his perceptions of the situation must have been profoundly affected by the conceptions and interests of those presenting the information.

What follows is offered as no more than a few tentative steps towards analysing the conditions under which the external policy of the Empire was formulated and put into effect in the four centuries between Actium and Hadrianople. The need for such an approach is widely recognized,[12] and the theme is of considerable relevance to our understanding of the nature of the Empire. The discussion will be based on literary and documentary evidence, will have to be highly selective, and will do no justice to the complexities of particular campaigns or the archaeology of individual frontiers. But it may serve to raise some questions, and to emphasize the limits imposed on policy and its execution by Graeco-Roman culture, the structure of government, time, distance and the conventions of diplomacy. No apology is made for the use of arguments from silence. We must *as a first step* listen to what our sources explicitly tell us, and refrain from making assumptions as to what they do not tell us. If we then wish

[11] See A. Maricq, 'Res Gestae Divi Saporis', *Syria* xxxv (1958), 295. This episode is described in ll. 6–9; Shapur claims that he killed Gordian in battle and that Philip then made peace on payment of a large sum. Zosimus i, 18–19 reports that Gordian won a victory and was then killed by the troops, instigated by Philip; cf. Eutropius ix, 2, 2–3; Aurelius Victor, *Caes.* 27, 8.

[12] For recent discussions of these and comparable problems see for instance B. H. Warmington, 'Frontier Studies and the History of the Roman Empire – some desiderata', *Actes du IX^e Congrès international d'études sur les frontières romaines, 1972* (1974), 291; A. R. Birley, 'Roman Frontiers and Roman Frontier Policy: Some Reflections on Roman Imperialism', *Trans. Archit. and Arch. Soc. Durham and Northumbd* iii (1974), 13; G. D. B. Jones, 'Concept and development in Roman Frontiers', *Bull. John Rylands Lib.* lxi (1978), 115. See also J. C. Mann, op. cit. (note 7), the essays in D. H. Miller and J. D. Steffen (eds.), *The Frontier: Comparative Studies* (1978), and G. W. Bowersock, 'The Emperor's Burden', *Class. Philol.* lxxiii (1978), 346.

to claim (for instance) that the Emperors systematically gathered and stored information from traders and others, at least we shall know that this is a hypothesis.

2. *The Agents of Decision*

No-one will argue that the *comitia* in Rome still played any part in the declaration of war or the making of treaties. Nor is there any reason to think that the Senate acted as a genuine vehicle of decision in military or foreign policy matters, in the sense of being a forum of debate where contrary opinions were expressed and votes taken. That said, however, the evidence shows that up to the mid-second century it could and often did play at least a formal role in matters affecting wars, 'client' kings and foreign relations. It seems indeed to have lost this role at roughly the same time as it ceased to receive embassies from provincial communities, a process which of course always retained the formal character of diplomatic traffic.[13]

In the early Empire the Senate might be the scene of the trials of 'client' kings,[14] though it was a sign of the future that, when in 23 B.C. Augustus brought Tiridates in person to appear against an embassy from Phraates in the Senate, the latter referred the matter back to him.[15] Under Tiberius the Senate was supposed to receive reports from Imperial *legati*, and was consulted on the recruitment and discharge of soldiers, the disposition of the legions and *auxilia* and on replies to kings.[16] If we may believe Strabo's contemporary account, the decision to make Cappadocia a province in A.D. 17 was taken jointly by Emperor and Senate.[17] In 19 Tiberius addressed the Senate after granting refuge to Maroboduus, arguing that the king had been a greater threat than Pyrrhus or Antiochus III.[18] Gaius had the Senate vote on the grant of various client kingdoms in 38,[19] and under Claudius it voted that treaties made by the Emperor or his *legati* should be valid as if passed by Senate and People.[20] In 49 Parthian ambassadors appeared in the Senate and were answered by a speech from Claudius;[21] Trajan in 102 sent ambassadors from Decebalus to speak in the Senate and have the peace-treaty confirmed, and when the king was reported to have broken it the Senate declared him a *hostis*.[22] Under Hadrian embassies from Vologaeses of Parthia and the Iazyges appeared in the Senate,[23] while Marcus Aurelius formally asked the Senate to vote funds for the war of 178 – but, as Dio makes clear, solely as a deliberate gesture to constitutional theory.[24] When Dio suggests in the 'speech of Maecenas' that embassies from hostile and allied kings or nations should be brought before the Senate, this clearly no longer corresponded to the reality of the early third century: 'for, other questions apart, it is appropriate and impressive if the Senate seems to have full powers.'[25] However, even in this period, as they had done from the beginning, the Emperors would write reports to the Senate on their military and diplomatic dealings.[26]

[13] F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (henceforth *ERW*) (1977), 343.

[14] e.g. Antiochus of Commagene, Dio lii, 43; Archelaus of Cappadocia, Dio lvii, 17, 3–6; Rhescuporis of Thrace, Tacitus, *Ann.* ii, 67.

[15] Dio liii, 33, 1–2.

[16] Suetonius, *Tib.* 30; 32.

[17] *Geog.* xii, 1, 4 (534).

[18] Tacitus, *Ann.* ii, 63.

[19] Dio lix, 12, 2.

[20] Dio lx, 23, 6. See P. A. Brunt, 'Lex de Imperio Vespasiani', *JRS* lxvii (1977), 95, on p. 103.

[21] Tacitus, *Ann.* xii, 10–11.

[22] Dio lxviii, 9, 7–10, 1; 10, 3–4.

[23] Dio lxix, 15, 2.

[24] Dio lxxii, 33, 2.

[25] Dio lii, 31, 1.

[26] See e.g. Dio liv, 9, 1 (Augustus to the Senate on foreign policy issues, 20 B.C.); Suetonius, *Calig.* 44; Dio lxviii, 29, 1–3 (Trajan from Parthia); lxxvii, 12, 3 (Caracalla); lxxiii, 27, 3 (Macrinus, 218).

In the 160s, when for the first time there were two Augusti, Lucius Verus' letter of report from Parthia was read in the Senate, and accompanied by a speech from Marcus Aurelius.[27]

These procedures cannot be regarded as having been vehicles of debate or decision, but like the related process of voting military honours for Emperors and others,[28] they were by no means irrelevant to the issues discussed here. Even these formal votes, and the orations which accompanied them, will have served to formulate the prevailing notions of what constituted success in military and diplomatic policy, and hence to form those presuppositions which would lie behind future objectives.

The question of such a slowly evolving consensus is all the more vital because, as is beyond question, external policy was in fact created throughout the period within the framework provided by the Emperor, his senatorial and equestrian *amici*, and his 'secretarial' staff. It hardly needs stating once again that our evidence provides no hint of any ministries, headquarters or general staffs established in Rome, or in the Tetrarchic or fourth-century 'capitals', and functioning independently of the Emperor. It was only in the late fourth century, and in the West, that *magistri militum* attained a real military independence of the Emperors.[29]

If we look first at the bureaucratic or 'secretarial' entourage, as opposed to *amici* or officers, all our evidence combines to suggest its essentially civilian character. It is not only that there is, for instance, very little trace of *commentarii* or other records relating to military or diplomatic matters, to match those concerned with Imperial legal decisions, the foundation of colonies or the granting of the citizenship or other *beneficia*.[30] It is rather that the 'secretarial' entourage of the Emperors visibly developed to serve civilian purposes: the hearing of embassies and legal cases, replying to *libelli*, writing letters in Latin and Greek. There was later an *a memoria*, or later still *magister memoriae*, of uncertain function – but never, surprisingly enough, any official concerned with *edicta*.[31] The standard assumptions about the functions of the Imperial entourage are clearly expressed by Dio in the 'speech of Maecenas': 'Moreover, as regards legal cases, letters and decrees of the cities, petitions of individuals and whatever else concerns the administration of the Empire, you should have helpers and assistants from among the equites.'[32] There is no trace here – or elsewhere – of Imperial 'secretaries' specifically concerned with military matters or foreign affairs. The pattern persists through the period, and beyond. The *Notitia* lists the four established *magistri:* of the *memoria*, the *epistolae*, the *libelli* and the *epistolae graecae*.[33]

Any 'secretarial' functions in relation to military matters or foreign affairs must then have been performed by these primarily civilian officials. Since, as we shall see, the Emperors conducted an extensive exchange of letters and embassies with foreign rulers, it is natural to think first of the *ab epistulis/magister epistolarum*, and the (much less often attested) *a legationibus*. But in fact the little evidence which we have for their role concerns not the reception of embassies or the preparation of letters at court, but the despatch of occasional 'secretarial' officials on foreign missions. For instance, it was evidently while he was on such a mission in about 173 that Marcus Aurelius' *ab epistulis Latinis*, Taruttienus Paternus, was held and ill-treated by the Cotini, who had promised military collaboration against the

[27] Fronto, *Ad Verum Imp.* ii, 1, 3–4.

[28] To take only two examples, note the *triumphalia ornamenta* voted by the Senate to Agricola (Tacitus, *Agric.* 40), and the three statues voted to M. Bassaeus Rufus on the motion of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, *ILS* 1326.

[29] See e.g. Jones, *LRE*, 174–8.

[30] On these see *ERW*, 259–72. Augustus' *breviarium* (Suetonius, *Aug.* 101) did contain details of how many soldiers were under arms.

[31] *ERW*, 252–9.

[32] Dio lii, 33, 5.

[33] *Not. Dig., Or.* xix; *Occ.* xvii (minus the *epistolae graecae*).

Marcomanni.[34] Then, at the end of the third century, we find Sicorius Probus, the *magister memoriae*, being sent from Nisibis by Diocletian and Galerius as ambassador to Narses, and making a speech before him with proposals for the regulation of the Tigris frontier.[35] The detailed accounts in Ammianus of the reception by the Emperor of embassies and letters from foreign rulers, and the despatch of others, show important roles as ambassadors being entrusted to court officials (*praefecti praetorio*, *comites*, *tribuni et notarii*), or high-ranking officers (*magistri militum* or *duces*),[36] and in one case to a philosopher, Eustathius. As both Ammianus and Libanius make clear, he was selected personally for his oratorical powers, and Eunapius gives a highly coloured account of his success with Shapur II.[37] These narratives never show any specific role being performed by the 'secretarial' *magistri*, though we do find some Alamannic ambassadors in 364 or 365 being rudely treated by Ursacius, the *magister officiorum*.[38] The reason why court officials play so small a part in the accounts of the reception of embassies is quite simply that the Emperors conducted all such negotiations in person through public verbal exchanges which naturally lent themselves to narrative presentation.[39] This highly personal and dramatic element was an essential feature of Imperial foreign relations, and it was appropriate that Eunapius, in describing negotiations between Julian and the king of the Chamavi, made an explicit comparison with a scene on the stage.[40]

If the Emperor possessed any secretarial staff specifically for the conduct of frontier policy or diplomacy, all trace of it has disappeared. As regards advisers whom he could consult, it was normal from the beginning for one Praetorian Prefect or both to be in attendance on the Emperor,[41] as will have been the tribunes of any praetorian cohorts which were accompanying him. When an Emperor was on campaign he could naturally consult the consular or praetorian *legati* of any legions which were in his vicinity, or the equestrian commanders of auxiliary units. Beyond that, in the first three centuries, if he were in Rome he would consult whichever *amici* of senatorial or equestrian rank he chose to summon to him; if he were travelling in Italy or the provinces or were on campaign, the choice was inevitably restricted to those whom he had already selected to take with him as his *comites*. Thus, as regards Rome, Tacitus shows that Nero in 63, after receiving some Parthian ambassadors bringing a letter from Vologaeses, and interrogating the centurion who had accompanied them, consulted 'among the *principes civitatis*' as to whether there should be peace or war.[42] The same procedure is implied in Juvenal's *Fourth Satire*, 144–9, with Domitian's *amici* hurrying to the Arx Albana 'as if he were about to speak about the Chatti or the wild Sygambri, and as if from distant parts of the earth an urgent letter had come on headlong wing'.

Outside Rome, we see for instance Otho's advisers debating the prospects of the civil war of 69: five persons give their opinions, including his brother and his Praetorian Prefect, and the prime role is played by Suetonius Paulinus, on the basis of his established reputation as a military man.[43] The *optimates* whom Marcus Aurelius would consult on both military and civil matters[44] were with him and Commodus when he died (at Sirmium or Vindobona) in

[34] Dio lxxi, 12, 3. The *Tabula Banasitana* attests this form of his name.

[35] Petrus Patricius, Fr. 14 (*FHG* iv, p. 189).

[36] Ammianus xvii, 5 & 14, xviii, 2, 2 (*tribunus*); xix, 11, 5 (two *tribuni* with interpreters); xxv, 7, 7 (Praetorian Prefect and, probably, *comes rei militaris*); xxvii, 5, 1 (*magister equitum*); 5 (*magistri*)?; xxxi, 7, 1 (*magister equitum*).

[37] Ammianus xvii, 5, 15: 'ut opifex suadendi'; Libanius, *Ep.* 331; Eunapius, *Vit. Soph.* 365 (also noting that high military or civilian officials were normally sent on embassies).

[38] Ammianus xxvi, 5, 7.

[39] See further p. 15 below.

[40] Eunapius, *Fr.* 12 (*FHG* iv, pp. 17–19).

[41] *ERW*, 127.

[42] *Ann.* xv, 24–5.

[43] Tacitus, *Hist.* ii, 31–3.

[44] *HA*, *v. M. Ant.* 22. 3.

180. Both Dio and Herodian report that it was against their advice that the young Commodus made peace, abandoned the Marcomannic war and returned to Rome.[45] This is a cardinal instance of the essential weakness of the position of the *amici* or *comites*. It lay solely with the Emperor whether to have them with him, to consult them on any particular issue or to take their advice. They had no power base, were nobody's delegates or representatives and could not compel him even if they were unanimous.

The other essential feature of the institution of the *consilium* in the early Empire was the absence of any distinction of function (juridical, administrative, political or military) between its members. In this respect the structural developments of the third and fourth centuries brought some changes, not easily defined. In the century from 250 to 350 the few brief accounts we have of discussions between the Emperor and advisers tend to single out persons holding specific military ranks, *praefecti*, *tribuni* or *duces*;[46] we have no evidence to indicate whether the *magistri militum* created by Constantine began at once to act as military advisers to the Emperor. When Ammianus' narrative is available, for the years from 353 onwards, we have various descriptions of councils of war: before Ctesiphon in 363; when Valentinian was hesitating in 364 between repelling the Alamannic invasion of Gaul and confronting the still vaguely reported coup of Procopius in the East; and later when he was dissuaded by his advisers from marching from Rhine to Danube against the Quadi until he had made peace with the Alamanni and had waited for the Spring of 375.[47] But unfortunately only the account of the council of war held by Valens before Hadrianople in 378 gives any indication of the ranks or offices of the persons consulted: the persons of 'various ranks' (*potestates variae*) included Sebastianus, the *magister peditum* who was in favour of immediate action, and Victor, the *magister equitum*, who vainly advised awaiting Gratian and his forces.[48] The specific accounts of strategic or tactical debates within the Imperial entourage are thus both rather deficient in indications of the composition of the entourage (Ammianus notes a few paragraphs later that the Praetorian Prefect and the *consistoriani* were at Hadrianople)[49] and not very clear on who was actually consulted. A much clearer impression of the military character of the entourage in the fourth century is given by Ammianus' accounts of those moments, in 363 and 364, when the death of an Emperor left it with the task of selecting his successor and proclaiming him first to the army on the spot and then to the Empire.[50] Here too, as in the events leading to Hadrianople, when Gratian's only means of attempting to intervene was a letter carried from Sirmium by the *comes domesticorum*, Richomer,[51] we see the fundamental limitations placed by time, space and delays of communication on the ways in which the Empire could function as a system.

3. *Communication and Responsibility*

It is thus clear enough, first, that immediate tactical, strategic and diplomatic decisions by the Emperor could only be taken on the spot wherever he and his entourage were; and secondly that, whatever advice he received, these decisions were taken by the Emperor in person. That still leaves open the question of responsibility and decision-making in relation to military or diplomatic operations conducted in the absence of the Emperor. To illustrate the nature of the problem we may take two well-known instances from the first century. The

[45] Dio lxxiii, 1, 2; Herodian i, 6. For the treaty negotiations see p. 15 below.

[46] *ERW*, 121–2.

[47] Ammianus xxiv, 7, 1; xxvi, 5, 8–13; xxx, 3; (see further p. 23 below). Note also Eunapius, Fr. 42 (*FGH* iv, pp. 31–3) on the discussion of the Goths' request to be allowed across the Danube.

[48] Ammianus xxxi, 12, 5–7. For Sebastianus' rank, *PLRE* i, Sebastianus 2.

[49] xxxi, 12, 10.

[50] xxv, 5 (Jovian), see 8, 8–11 (communications to the West); xxvi, 1–2 (Valentinian).

[51] xxxi, 12, 4.

first is the record of his governorship of Moesia in about 60–7 from the inscription of Tiberius Plautius Silvanus Aelianus on his family tomb at Tibur, listing the following activities:[52]

1. More than 100,000 'Transdanuviani' brought across with their wives and children and chiefs or kings (and settled) 'so that they paid tribute'.
2. A Sarmatian threat repressed, though part of his army had been withdrawn for operations in Armenia.
3. Previously unknown or hostile kings brought to the bank of the Danube to do reverence to the Roman standards.
4. The return to the kings of the Bastarnae and Rhoxolani of their sons, and (probably) to the king of the Dacians of his brother(s), whom he had captured or taken from their enemies.
5. The acceptance from some of these kings of hostages, by which the peace of the province was confirmed and extended.
6. The deterrence (by military or diplomatic means?) of the king of the Scythians from the siege of Chersonesus, 'which lies beyond the Borysthenes'.
7. The despatch of corn to Rome.

The record shows features which characterized Roman frontier operations, in this area above all, throughout the period: the combined employment of force and diplomacy; the steady absorption of barbarians, whether as settlers or soldiers or both;[53] and the assumption implicit in the language of the inscription that the Danube and its banks constituted the frontier of the Empire. The inscription reflects and expresses a common stock of conceptions about frontier objectives, not all of which will have needed to be expressed in formal instructions from the Emperor. We know of course that governors of all types received instructions (*mandata*) from the Emperor, covering administrative, legal and military matters, at least in the sense of the disposition and discipline of troops. The evidence implies however that by the end of the second century the *mandata* had ossified into a code which was not specific to particular provinces or circumstances.[54] There seems however to be no evidence as to whether the *mandata* included instructions of a strategic or diplomatic nature, whether related to the particular time and place or of a general character.[55] If such instructions were not provided, then we must either accept that there actually was no 'Imperial' policy for Moesia in this period, or suppose either that Nero wrote subsequently to Aelianus on specific points or that Aelianus will have consulted him before taking major steps. At least one such letter of instruction must have reached Aelianus, on the detachment of some of his troops (the legion V Macedonica) for the Armenian campaign. From parallel cases it is clear that there could have been other letters of instruction, though the inscription, put up under Vespasian, would not emphasize either that or consultation of Nero. For instance Josephus records that Tiberius wrote to L. Vitellius as *legatus* of Syria, probably in 35, to give him detailed instructions on the resumption of diplomatic relations with Artabanus of Parthia.[56] Subsequently, Herod Antipas wrote from Galilee to make accusations against Aretas of Nabataea, and Tiberius wrote to Vitellius instructing him to take his army against Aretas. When Vitellius

[52] *ILS* 986.

[53] I am very grateful to Dr G. E. M. de Ste Croix for letting me see in advance App. iii. of *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (1981), which contains the most complete collection of the evidence on barbarian settlement.

[54] *ERW*, 314–17, corrected as regards proconsuls by G. P. Burton, 'The Issuing of Mandata to Proconsuls and a New Inscription from Cos', *ZPE* xxi (1976), 63.

[55] Tacitus, *Ann.* ii, 77, implies that the *mandata* given to the *legatus* of Syria concerned his military role, but says nothing of their contents.

[56] Josephus, *Ant.* xviii, 4, 4 (96). For the date see Tacitus, *Ann.* vi, 31–7, and Dio lviii, 26.

had reached Jerusalem, news came of the death of Tiberius, and he returned to Syria 'no longer being empowered as before since control of affairs had passed to Gaius'.[57]

Precisely the same questions arise with the second instance, the governorship of Agricola in Britain in 78–84. Nothing is said by Tacitus about *mandata* from Vespasian, or about subsequent instructions from him, Titus or Domitian, or about consultation of them by Agricola. But the statement that he did not enshrine the report of his containment of the Ordovices in a laurelled letter (18) surely implies at least that end-of-campaign reports were normal. Such reports are not mentioned again however until after the victory at Mons Graupius, when they were followed by the vote of *triumphalia ornamenta* and of a statue by the Senate – and a letter of recall from Domitian (39–40). But if there is any truth in Dio's confused report that Titus had gained an imperatorial acclamation as a result of Agricola's successes in Britain, there must have been reports to him too.[58] Tacitus' account however provides no positive reason to believe that the consolidation of N. Wales, the advance into S. Scotland and up the E. coast, the battle of Mons Graupius or, on the diplomatic side, the reception of a fugitive chief from Ireland (24) or the demand for hostages from tribes in Scotland (38) followed any specific Imperial plan or instructions. It is a reasonable speculation, but only a speculation, that *Agricola* 23 might reflect a decision by Titus that Agricola should halt on the Forth–Clyde line, then reversed by Domitian.[59] The recall of Agricola, combined with the very clear archaeological evidence for the establishment of the legionary fortress at Inchtuthil, perhaps in 84, and its systematic dismantlement in about 87, along with the withdrawal of the legion II Adiutrix perhaps in the same year, and its transference to Moesia,[60] might suggest that Imperial 'policy' could often consist of allowing *legati* to follow their own presumptions, until external factors, a major crisis or their own excessive activity, compelled intervention. Alternatively, intervention might follow more quickly, as we see in the case of Corbulo as *legatus* of the lower Rhine army in 47. The Chauci stirred, and Corbulo moved against them, apparently reporting his action to Rome. While he was building a camp in enemy territory, a letter arrived from Claudius ordering an end to operations and a withdrawal back across the Rhine.[61] If the *legatus* did not write to the Emperor, the *procurator* might, as we see in the well-known case of Classicianus' report to Nero from Britain, and the mission of Polyclitus (*Ann.* xiv, 38–9).

Alternatively, a *legatus* might write to the Emperor to request his instructions before taking action. So for instance Domitius Marsianus, the *legatus* of Syria, wrote to Claudius to report that Agrippa I was strengthening the walls of Jerusalem, and evoked a letter from the Emperor to the king telling him to stop.[62] Similarly, Caesennius Paetus, as *legatus* of Syria in about 72, reported to Vespasian that Antiochus of Commagene was conspiring with Vologaeses of Parthia and received instructions to invade the kingdom and bring royal rule to an end.[63]

It is easy to take such correspondence for granted, as we do the communications between Pliny in Bithynia and Trajan in Rome. But it is essential to emphasize its limitations as a decision-making procedure. First, there were the delays in time. There is no evidence that the Empire possessed any signalling procedure capable of transmitting complex messages (or indeed any long-distance signalling procedure at all). If in fact Augustus ever established relays of runners for carrying messages (which would have been prohibitively expensive in

[57] ibid. xviii, 5, 1 (115); 5, 3 (120–4).

[58] Dio lxvi, 20, under A.D. 79, and mentioning the fifteenth acclamation, correctly dated to that year, together with the circumnavigation of Britain, which happened in Agricola's sixth year (83).

[59] For this view S. S. Frere, *Britannia*[2] (1978), 126–8.

[60] See Frere, op. cit. (note 59), 136–8.

[61] Tacitus, *Ann.* xi, 19–20; Dio lxi, 30, 4–5 (4).

[62] Josephus, *Ant.* xix, 7, 2 (326–7).

[63] Josephus, *B.J.* vii, 7, 1–3 (219–43).

manpower if widely used), this procedure was quickly replaced by a system whereby messengers travelled the entire distance, and could be questioned for further information on arrival.[64] The system relied on the use of *diplomata* to requisition horses or *vehicula*, and later on the relays of horses available at the posting-stations (*mansiones*). Since everything depended on the urgency of the situation and the physical resilience of the messengers (not to speak of the efficiency and co-operativeness of the persons supplying horses or vehicles), all that is really certain is that reports of exceptionally fast journeys over a few days by highly motivated individuals can be no guide to normal speeds; and that the speeds actually achieved must have dropped in proportion to the length of the journeys undertaken. For the relatively urgent messages with which we are concerned, the truth should lie somewhere between the fifty Roman miles per day estimated by Ramsay as typical,[65] and Procopius' assumption, relating to the developed system of the late Empire, that a messenger could cover 10 times the normal daily distance for a traveller in a day, i.e., about 200 miles.[66] On that basis messengers going by land from Antioch to Rome, about 3,000 miles, are not likely to have taken less than a month, with a similar period for the return journey. Much faster journeys were possible by sea of course, for instance nine days from Puteoli to Alexandria.[67] But even where sea-communications were relevant, as between Rome and Syria, they were acutely unreliable: the messengers bringing a threatening letter from Gaius to Petronius, *legatus* of Syria, were storm-bound for three months, and arrived 27 days after later messengers carrying the news of Gaius' death.[68] Moreover sea-travel by official passengers or groups (like the escort which took a whole winter to bring Paul and other prisoners from Judaea to Rome) depended on the availability of trading-ships. Even Emperors occasionally travelled on merchant-ships, and there is no clear evidence of the regular use of the Imperial navy for transporting messengers.[69] In this connection we may note the evidence of *Dig.* xlv, 1, 122, 1, of a nautical loan contract which allowed 200 days for a round trip from Berytus to Brundisium and back.

Thus, with the partial exception of the Rome–Alexandria voyage, the Mediterranean did not provide a medium of speedy and reliable internal communications for the Empire; the official voyages envisaged in the *Imperatoris Augusti Itinerarium Maritimum* were coastal or went from island to island. So the communications with which we are concerned depended on the use of animal power on land, and all the more so after it became clear that the three key frontiers were those of the Euphrates, Danube and Rhine. The mere fact of delay, in any case common to the Empire and its neighbours, and inbuilt into the economic and social fabric of the ancient world, did not of course prohibit consultation on military matters, any more than it prevented the constant resort of provincial embassies to the Emperor, or correspondence on other matters between Emperors and officials, in which intervals of several months between the composition of an Imperial letter or edict and its receipt or promulgation were common.[70] Indeed it is clear that in diplomatic traffic at least it was possible to tolerate delays far greater than those strictly imposed by the conditions of travel: in 356 Constantius and Julian wrote to the Praetorian Prefect to say that no Roman emissary on his way to Axum or the Homeritae should remain in Alexandria for more than a year, or draw rations there

[64] Suetonius, *Aug.* 49.

[65] For discussions of the Imperial communication-system see W. Riepl. *Das Nachrichtenwesen des Altertums mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Römer* (1913), 123–240; W. M. Ramsay, 'The Speed of the Roman Imperial Post', *JRS* xv (1925), 60; M. Amit, 'Les moyens de communication et la défense de l'Empire romain', *Parola del Passato* xx (1965), 207.

[66] Procopius, *Hist. Arc.* 30, cited by Riepl. op. cit. (note 65), 186.

[67] Pliny, *NH* xix, 3.

[68] Josephus, *BJ* ii, 10, 5 (203); *Ant.* xviii, 8, 9 (305).

[69] C. G. Starr, *The Roman Imperial Navy* (1941), 177–8.

[70] *ERW* 39; 254.

after that time.[71] Nor would the slowness of travel, especially by large bodies of men, affect those operations where the initiative lay in Roman hands. Thus for the invasion of Britain in 43 it was possible to concentrate not only three legions from the Rhine but one from Pannonia, which must have involved a march of two–three months to the Channel.[72] But the effect of distance and delay must either have been to allow considerable latitude to local commanders at least in the medium term, or alternatively to paralyse significant initiatives or responses while the lengthy process of consultation was carried out. This fact could on occasion be put to good effect, as in the anecdote recorded by Petrus Patricius of a governor of Moesia Inferior under Gordian III telling a delegation of Carpi that he would consult the Emperor about their demands for a subvention, and that they should return after four months to hear the answer.[73]

4. *The Concentration of Strategic Decision-making*

In a different political system the effect of these irremovable limitations on communication might have been a diffusion of political and military power and hence of strategic and diplomatic initiative and responsibility. But in fact, as is clear, the opposite development occurred, and the Emperors tended to concentrate the direction of military affairs more and more definitely in their own hands. In the 370s, for instance, we find the *duces* on the Danube telling the Goths that they cannot let them cross the Danube without the Emperor's permission.[74] Valens himself, on receiving the news of the threat to Thrace, sent emissaries to settle the Armenian question and hastened back from the Persian front to meet his death at Hadrianople.[75]

From the very beginning, from Augustus' wars in Spain in 27–4 B.C. onwards, the notion that direct military command was an essential Imperial function was present and was of great importance. But in the first century it was still possible, as the operations of Corbulo in Armenia show, for major campaigning to be conducted in the absence of the Emperor. Subsequently that ceased to be so, in either offensive or defensive warfare, and the consequences were of the greatest importance for the evolving structure of Imperial rule. Why this evolution took place is not a question which allows any simple answer. But some factors are clear. The first is that the fact that the Empire was a monarchy was immediately noticed and acted upon by foreign kings and rulers, some of them at immense distances. There thus begun at once that traffic in embassies, fugitive princes, hostages, letters, gifts and (from the Emperor) the bestowal of crowns which was one of the embodiments of the Emperor's supremacy and was to be one of the most important functions of the Byzantine Emperors.[76] It is necessary to stress that this very personal and monarchical element is strongly emphasized in the actual sentence structures of the relevant part of Augustus' *Res Gestae*: 'Ad me ex India . . . nostram amicitiam appetiverunt . . . ad me supplices confugerunt . . . ad me rex Parthorum . . . a me gentes Parthorum et Medorum . . .' (31–3). Several passages in Strabo's *Geography* offer confirmation of Augustus' claims, for instance that on the British chiefs who had gained the friendship of the Emperor by embassies and diplomacy and had made offerings on the Capitol;[77]

[71] *CTh* xii, 12, 2. Note that Flavius Abinnaeus spent three years escorting back *refugae* or *legati* of the Blemyes (*P. Abinn.* 1).

[72] The camp of IX Hispana in Pannonia is not known. The march must have meant going either through Noricum and Raetia or through N. Italy and across the Alps.

[73] Petrus Patricius, Fr. 8 (*FGH* iv, pp. 186–7). For the governor, Iulius (?) Menophilus see Barbieri, *Albo senatorio*, no. 1071.

[74] Eunapius, Fr. 42 (*FGH* iv, p. 31); cf. Zosimus iv, 20, 6.

[75] Ammianus xxxi, 7, 1; 11, 1–2; 12, 1–4; Zosimus iv, 21.

[76] See J. Gagé, 'L'empereur romain et les rois: politique et protocole', *Rev. Hist.* ccxxi (1959), 22.

[77] *Geog.* iv, 5, 3 (200).

or the embassy from a king in India which (as Strabo describes) Nicolaus of Damascus encountered in Antioch on its way to Augustus. The three ambassadors who had survived the journey were carrying a letter in Greek in which Poros described himself as king over 600 other kings, and offered any collaboration which Augustus required: with the letter came gifts, born by eight slaves, naked except for scented loincloths, namely a freak, some large snakes, a serpent 10 cubits in length, a turtle 3 cubits long and a partridge larger than a vulture.[78] This embassy in fact reached Augustus in Samos in the winter of 20/19 B.C.;[79] and it had been there also, in the previous winter, that an Ethiopian embassy had appeared before him. The circumstances, again described by Strabo, are of considerable significance. When in 24–2 Ethiopian forces attacked the fort of Primis (Qaṣr Ibrîm) the Prefect of Egypt, Petronius, reinforced it in time, and when an Ethiopian embassy arrived told them to go to Augustus:[80]

> When they said that they did not know who Caesar was or how they were to reach him he provided them with an escort. They travelled to Samos where Caesar was, as he intended to go on to Syria and to send Tiberius into Armenia. They gained everything for which they asked, and he released them also from the tributes which he had imposed.

The diplomatic and military role in the East delegated by Augustus to Tiberius in person was in fact highly significant for the future. None the less it is conceivable that if the Empire could have achieved overall the secure dominance momentarily demonstrated on both the Eastern and Nubian fronts in the late 20s B.C., its frontier and diplomatic policy might indeed have been directed from Rome or wherever in the Mediterranean the Emperor happened to be. Such a state of affairs was almost secured in the middle of the second century, when Appian gives his eye-witness report of the conduct of diplomacy by Antoninus Pius:[81]

> The Emperors, in addition to the original provinces, have added some further areas to their rule and have suppressed some which broke away. In general, possessing by good government the most important parts of land and sea, they prefer to preserve their empire rather than extend it indefinitely to poor and profitless barbarian peoples. I have seen embassies from some of these in Rome offering themselves as subjects, and the Emperor refusing them, on the grounds that they would be of no use to him. For other peoples, limitless in number, the Emperors appoint the kings, not requiring them for the Empire. On some of the provinces they spend more than they receive, thinking it shameful to give them up even though they are loss-making. They surround the empire with a circle of great camps and guard so great an area of land and sea like an estate.

It was of Antoninus Pius also that Fronto, in the course of a speech of congratulation on the completion of a war in Britain 'declared that although he had committed the conduct of the campaign to others, while sitting at home himself in the Palace in Rome, yet like the helmsman at the tiller of a ship of war, the glory of the whole navigation and voyage belonged to him'.[82] Although the theme of Pius' control by correspondence from the centre reappears both in Aristides' *Roman Oration* (31–3) and in the *Historia Augusta*,[83] the element of special pleading on Fronto's part is evident. Even in the first century it had been only those Emperors,

[78] ibid. xv, 1, 73 (719) = Jacoby, *FGrH* 90, F. 100.
[79] Dio liv, 9, 8–10.
[80] *Geog.* xvii, 1, 54 (820–1); cf. *JRS* lxix (1979), 127.
[81] Appian, *Praef.* 7/25–8.
[82] *Pan.* viii (V), 14, 2, Loeb trans. (*Correspondence of M. Cornelius Fronto* ii, 251),
[83] *HA, v. Ant. Pii* 7, 11–12.

such as Tiberius or Vespasian, who enjoyed an already established military reputation, who could afford to lead no war of conquest. It does not need demonstration that Claudius' invasion of Britain, lavishly celebrated in Rome and throughout the Empire, arose at least in part from the opposite case; and the fact that Pliny in his *Panegyric* can refer to no significant military achievements of Trajan before his accession surely has some relevance to the Dacian and Parthian wars which he led. Then, after the lull of Hadrian's and Antoninus Pius' reigns, we find that it is assumed that all major wars, whether defensive or offensive, are implicitly held to require the presence of the – or an – Emperor. Though the gradually growing predominance of defensive warfare is undeniable, the ideal of conquest was not wholly abandoned. We need not disbelieve the *Historia Augusta*'s claim that Marcus eventually intended to create two new provinces, Marcomannia and Sarmatia, beyond the Danube;[84] according to Herodian Severus spontaneously chose to undertake the British expedition of 208–11, as a training for Caracalla and Geta;[85] and above all the extension of provincial territory to the Tigris, and at times beyond, meant – as Dio saw – a wholly new strategic commitment whose consequences for the Empire were incalculable. Whether or not the overthrow of the Parthian empire by the new Persian dynasty of the Sassanids was one of those consequences, Herodian's account (vi. 2 f.) of Roman reactions in the 220s and 230s shows very clearly how rigid were the assumptions which now prevailed as to the need for the Imperial presence on all major campaigns. Letters came from the governors of Syria and Mesopotamia to say that Artaxerxes (Ardashir) was threatening the whole Eastern empire. Severus Alexander consulted with his *amici* and sent an embassy with a letter warning Artaxerxes off; when this was ineffective, and the governors of the Eastern provinces 'were calling for him', Alexander marched via the Danubian provinces to Antioch. After further diplomatic exchanges, he mounted a triple invasion of Armenia and Mesopotamia. He was back in Antioch, probably over the winter of 232/3, when messengers brought news of German invasions across the Rhine and Danube, which demanded the presence of Alexander and the troops which he had taken East with him. The force of these reports was intensified by the reactions of those soldiers who had been transferred from the Danubian provinces. Herodian continues:[86]

> Alexander and the advisers who accompanied him were by this time even concerned about Italy, rating the German menace as very different from the Persians. The inhabitants of the Eastern territories, separated as they are by a wide stretch of land and sea, hardly hear about Italy. But the Illyrian provinces are a narrow stretch of land that do not occupy much of Roman territory. This makes the Germans practically adjacent neighbours of the Italians. Reluctantly and sadly (through sheer necessity) Alexander issued the proclamation of an expedition.

However vague and confused Herodian may be, it is a fact that in this situation Alexander felt himself compelled to undertake a march of over two thousand miles, which cannot have taken less than about five months. By 234 he was on the Rhine frontier, where he was murdered at Moguntiacum in 235. He had ruled as sole Emperor; but one direct consequence of the assumption that Emperors would conduct major campaigns in person was the multiplication of Emperors. This is already clear for instance in 260: when Valerian was captured by Shapur I in Mesopotamia, his son Gallienus, as joint *Augustus*, was conducting campaigns in N. Italy, and his grandson Saloninus, as *Caesar*, was commanding the Rhine frontier from Cologne. Precisely such necessities led to the formation of the Tetrarchy and then to the successive

[84] *HA*, *v. M. Ant.* 24, 5; cf. 27, 10. See A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (1966), 205–6, and op. cit. (note 12), 20–1; cf. A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia* (1974), 183–6; 193.

[85] Herodian iii, 14, 1–2.

[86] vi, 7, 4–5, Loeb trans.

semi-dynastic combinations of Emperors which characterized the fourth century. According to Zosimus, for instance, it was the existence of simultaneous threats to the Empire on several fronts which induced Constantius to appoint his cousin Julian as *Caesar* in 355, and send him to Gaul.[87]

It had already been established long before that an Emperor, once in command on a particular front, took direct tactical and strategic command of it, fighting battles and determining the geographical and physical character of frontier installations. For instance, we owe our only precise literary reference to the pushing forward of the German frontier in 83 to Frontinus:[88]

> Imperator Caesar Domitianus Augustus, cum Germani more suo e saltibus et obscuris latebris subinde impugnarent nostros, tutumque regressum in profundis silvarum haberent, limitibus per centum viginti milia passuum actis non mutavit tantum statum belli, sed et subiecit dicioni suae hostes, quorum refugia nudaverat.

The question of whether he means to say that Domitian drove roads directly into enemy territory,[89] or constructed *limites* laterally over a distance of 120 miles,[90] is not as significant for present purposes as the fact that Frontinus represents this as a strategic choice made by the Emperor in person. He similarly attributes to Domitian choices of other sorts: the ruse by which he set out from Rome on the pretence of conducting a census in Gaul; a tactical device used in battle against the Chatti; and the payment of compensation for land on which *castella* were built during the war.[91] Again, to give only isolated examples, the *Historia Augusta* attributes to the moment of Hadrian's visit to Britain in 121/2 his building of the Wall 'to separate the barbarians and the Romans'.[92] Dio describes Caracalla seeing to the siting of forts and settlements on his German campaign of 213,[93] while Ammianus mentions the fortification of Circesium by Diocletian, and details the major programme of military construction along the Rhine undertaken by Valentinian in 369 onwards.[94] J. J. Wilkes has drawn attention to the fact that inscriptions increasingly advertise the responsibility of Emperors for the construction of defensive works along or near the frontiers: 'following the subjugation and control of the Franks through the excellence of Constantine, the *castrum* of the *Divitenses* was constructed in their territory in the presence of the Emperor himself.'[95]

Direct tactical command necessarily brought with it the direct management of diplomatic contacts, which would otherwise have been handled, at least in the first instance, by provincial governors, or later *duces*, *comites* or *magistri*. Contacts with the Parthian and, later, Perian kings were always conducted by emissaries, who would speak before the Emperor or king in person; Augustus' grandson Gaius might meet the King of the Parthians on the Euphrates,[96] but the only occasion on which Emperor and King came face to face was the capture of Valerian. With lesser peoples the Emperor might actually confront their kings in person, as Trajan did with a succession of kings and dynasts on his Parthian campaigns.[97] So too Ammianus offers

[87] Zosimus iii, 1.
[88] *Strat.* i, 3, 10.
[89] So R. Syme, *CAH* xi, 162–3.
[90] So H. Schoenberger, *JRS* lix (1969), 159.
[91] *Strat.* i, 1, 8; ii, 3, 23; ii, 11, 7.
[92] *V. Had.* 11, 2.
[93] lxxvii, 13, 4 (388–9).
[94] Circesium: Ammianus xxiii, 5, 2. Rhine: xxviii, 2, 1–6, cf. xxx, 7, 6. See H. Schoenberger, *JRS* lix (1969), 182–6.
[95] *CIL* xiii, 8502 = *ILS* 8937; see J. J. Wilkes, 'British anonymity in the Roman Empire' in D. E. Johnston (ed.), *The Saxon Shore* (1977), 76.
[96] Velleius ii, 101.
[97] Dio lxviii, 18–19; 21 (Abgar of Osrhoene, cf. Arrian, *Parth.*, Fr. 46*).

a remarkable description of Valentinian negotiating from a boat on the Rhine with Macrianus, the king of the Alamanni, who was standing on the bank.[98]

Thus when Commodus rejected the advice of his *comites* to continue the Marcomannic war in 180 the mechanism of decision was that he received an embassy from the Marcomanni and Quadi and made peace with them on the following terms: the return of prisoners and deserters; the provision of a fixed quantity of corn each year; the supplying of weapons and of 13,000 soldiers from the Quadi and less from the Marcomanni; the restriction of their assemblies to once a month, in the presence of a Roman centurion; no attacks on the Iazyges, Buri or Vandals. In return he withdrew the forts placed in their territory. Comparable terms were granted to an embassy from the Buri on the borders of Dacia, with the additional provision that they should leave an uninhabited zone 40 stades wide along the frontier.[99]

The close combination of miltary and diplomatic functions, and the personal management of both by the Emperor, appear even more clearly in Dexippus' notable description of Aurelian's negotiations with the Juthungi in Pannonia in 270 or 271. He had defeated them and driven them back to the Danube, and now proposed to receive an embassy. To instil the due measure of fear (which seemed to be lacking) he received them dressed in his purple cloak, seated on a tribunal, with his officers on horseback about him and the army on parade. When given permission to speak, the ambassadors addressed him through an interpreter, and represented themselves as willing to make peace from a position of strength. The Emperor made a speech in reply, contemptuously rejecting their demands.[100]

5. *Information and Conceptual Frameworks*

Within the few years before his death in 275 Aurelian had marched East and in two campaigns destroyed the brief 'empire' of Palmyra, and then West and brought to an end the Imperium Galliarum. The Empire was thus substantially restored, but without the territories beyond the upper Rhine, and without Dacia, definitely abandoned perhaps in 271. Aurelian thus represents one of the extreme examples of the direct control of military operations by Emperors and of the sheer extent of the marches undertaken by those of the third and fourth centuries – and the last example of one who carried this burden without at least one co-Emperor. But his strategic choices may also, as we shall see (pp. 19–20) reflect one set of presuppositions on the part of educated inhabitants of the Empire as to the shape and strategic character of the Roman world.

These general presuppositions – not necessarily unanimous, as Dio's criticism of Severus shows – are of crucial importance precisely because of what seems on our evidence to have been the relative lack of short- or medium-term information on peoples and geographical features beyond the Empire. Three interlinked factors are involved here: the means by which information could be obtained; the forms in which it could be presented; and the conceptual frameworks within which it could be used to produce decisions about frontier policy. It will be obvious that these are immense topics, as to which only a few suggestions and items of evidence can be presented here.

First, then, there seem to be relatively few cases, all in the early empire, and all concerned with prospective Roman expeditions, where long-distance missions were sent to explore enemy territory for military purposes. Augustus despatched Dionysius of Charax to the East *ad commentanda omnia* in advance of Gaius Caesar's expedition.[101] More detail is reported of the party of praetorians under a tribune which was sent by Nero to Ethiopia with a view to

[98] xxx, 3, 4–5.
[99] Dio lxxii, 1–3 (282–4).
[100] Jacoby, *FGrH* 100, F. 6; see F. Millar, 'P. Herennius Dexippus', *JRS* lix (1969), 12, on p. 25.
[101] Pliny, *NH* vi, 141.

an expedition there. Their report described the flora and fauna of the region, the political structure of the kingdom, and the size of the army. More specifically, they gave the total distance between Syene and Meroe and the length of the stages from town to town.[102]

This last was of course a crucial question, whether it related to bodies of troops marching by land or to fleets moving along a coastline. Information on these points is a conspicuous feature of the *Periplus* of the Euxine sent to Hadrian by Arrian while he was *legatus* of Cappadocia in 131/2.[103] Only the first part (ch. 1–11) describes an actual voyage by Arrian as *legatus*, from Trapezus to Sebastopolis, the last auxiliary post on the East coast of the Euxine. He then adds a detailed guide to the coasting voyage from Byzantium to Trapezus, thus outside his province (12–16). At this point (17) Arrian writes: 'Since I have heard of the death of Cotys, king of the Cimmerian Bosporus, I have taken the trouble to describe to you the voyage as far as the Bosporus, so that if you are considering matters relating to the Bosporus you may be in a position to do so without being ignorant of the voyage there.' The work is therefore completed (18–25) with a full description of the voyage round the north and west coasts from Sebastopolis to Byzantium, with indications of distances and the capacity of the harbours.

This is not of course an example of an exploratory expedition. But the information is offered for the same purpose as that gained by the first-century expeditions, as a guide to movement in an area where intervention might be required. The particular feature of the core of information provided – the names of stopping-places and the distances between them – was that it could either be presented in literary form or be tabulated in the form of lists following particular routes or represented schematically on a map which did not have to be in proper topographical scale or proportion. So for instance a large number of the major sea and land routes could be tabulated verbally in the *Itinerarium Antonini*. One section (123. 8–147. 1) lists the stages of the key route from Rome to Antioch via the Balkans and Asia Minor, endlessly traversed by Emperors, and another (217. 5–231. 3) gives what may have been Caracalla's route along the Danube in 214. The listing of the legions in their long-established camps on the Danube may suggest a military purpose, as does the connection, proposed by D. van Berchem, with the *Historia Augusta's* report of Severus Alexander's procedure for announcing in advance his route from Rome 'ad fines barbaricos'.[104]

Such tabulations, essential for any movements within the Empire, whether of troops, the Imperial entourage or both, could also be extended outside the Empire if the relevant information were available. We can see an example in the *Parthian Stations* of Isidorus of Charax, which describes the major routes through the Parthian Empire as far as Arachosia.[105] In the second century the *Geographia* of Ptolemy, extending as far as India, grouped place-names by areas and located them by latitude and longitude. The absence of any sequential listing by routes must indicate that it could not have been intended for practical purposes, military

[102] ibid. vi 181–6; xii, 18–19; Seneca, *NQ* vi, 8, 3–5. See J. Desanges, *Recherches sur l'activité des Méditerranéens aux confins de l'Afrique* (1978), 323–5.

[103] See the edition by G. Marenghi, *Arriano, Periplo del Ponto Eusino* (1958). Note also H. F. Pelham, 'Arrian as legate of Cappadocia', *Essays* (1911), 212, and P. A. Stadter, *Arrian of Nicomedia* (1980), 32–41. An English translation and discussion of this extremely important text for frontier studies would be of great value.

[104] *HA, v. Sev. Alex.* 45, 2. See D. van Berchem, 'L'annone militaire dans l'Empire romain du III^e siècle', *Mém. Soc. Nat. Ant. Fr.* viii^e ser., x (1937), 117–201; cf. *ERW*, 31–3. For all questions relating to *itineraria* and maps note the invaluable discussions in A. L. F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (1979); for the *Itin. Ant.*, pp. 150–4.

[105] For the text see *Geog. Gr. Min.* i, 244–55. See A. S. Nodelman, 'A Preliminary History of Characene', *Berytus* xiii (1960), 83, on pp. 107–8, arguing against a possible identification with Dionysius of Charax, and suggesting a date in the later first century.

or otherwise. Nor is it certain whether actual maps accompanied the text.[106] For a schematic map incorporating practical information we must of course look to the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, generally accepted as going back to a map of the late Roman period (and emphasizing Rome, Constantinople and Antioch), which may hypothetically derive in part from earlier models, even from the map of Agrippa.[107] The original was designed functionally in two senses: to be used in roll form, and to indicate land-routes (but not sea-routes) schematically over the area from the Atlantic to Central Asia, marking distances, basic geographical features, towns and types of accommodation. There is nothing strictly to prove the official character of the original, and nothing even to suggest a military function. But a fragment of a comparable map – offering a schematic representation of a route round the Euxine – was found on the cover of a soldier's shield from Dura-Europos. This too gives essentially a sequence of places and distances; if conceived of as giving a visual impression of the actual topographical relationships of the places, it would be wholly misleading.[108]

We need not doubt that itineraries, whether in the form of sequential lists of places or of schematic maps, could be used for military movements within the Empire and (where towns, roads and information about them existed) outside it. Vegetius indeed advises that *itineraria* should be issued for all troops movements, showing distances, types of roads, short-cuts, stopping-places mountains and rivers. But, writing in an era of defensive warfare (probably under Theodosius I), he assumes that such movements will have taken place through existing Roman provinces: 'usque eo, ut sollertiores duces itineraria provinciarum, in quibus necessitas gerebatur, non tantum adnotata sed etiam picta habuisse firmentur'.[109]

Visual representation thus seems to have been secondary to schematic, or even purely verbal, tabulation of towns and stages. We cannot, unfortunately, form any clear conception of the map (?) – γεωγραφία – in the form of a tablet (πινάκιον) and containing διαγράμματα, for which Julian wrote to thank Alypius, who may then have been *vicarius Britanniarum*.[110] That suggests the possibility that office-holders could use visual means to inform Emperors – though the vicariate was a civil not a military office, and we do not know what region the map represented. But it still leaves a more fundamental question: if the Roman maps of which we can form any clear conception did not provide a realistic projection of land-masses (or still less of seas or the mutual relations of islands in seas), was it in principle possible for an Emperor, or anyone else, to conceive of the overall military situation in global strategic terms, or to consider for instance whether a frontier on the Elbe might have provided shorter lines of communication than one on the Rhine?[111] All that can be said is that our explicit evidence

[106] See *RE* s.v. 'Klaudios Ptolemaios', in Supp. x (1965), cols. 680–833; Rivet and Smith, op. cit. (note 104), 103–31.

[107] See now the invaluable facsimile edition, with accompanying volume of discussion and commentary, by E. Weber, *Tabula Peutingeriana: Codex Vindobonensis 324. Vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat* i–ii (1976). For the functional character of the map see esp. A. and M. Levi, *Itineraria Picta: contributo allo studio della Tabula Peutingeriana* (1967).

[108] F. Cumont, 'Fragment de bouclier portant une liste d'étapes', *Syria* vi (1925), 1; *Fouilles de Dura-Europos* (1926), 323 f.

[109] Vegetius, *Epit. rei mil.* iii, 6. See T. D. Barnes, 'The Date of Vegetius', *Phoenix* xxxiii (1979), 254. The remarkable description of the arrangements for the march of an army unit in Ambrose, *Sermo* v. 2 in Ps. 118 also refers to movements through provincial territory. I owe this reference to G. M. Koeppel, 'A Military *Itinerarium* on the Column of Trajan: Scene L', *Röm. Mitt.* lxxxvii (1980), 302, on p. 305, n. 24.

[110] Julian, *Ep.* 30 Hertlein; 10 Bidez-Cumont; 7 Loeb. See Rivet and Smith, op. cit. (note 104), 71.

[111] This is, as need hardly be said, the theory put forward in the classic chapter of R. Syme, 'The Northern Frontiers under Augustus', *CAH* x, 340–81, esp. 353–4. For a different view, P. A. Brunt, *JRS* liii (1963), 172–3.

does not seem to provide any clear instances of the use of maps in strategic or tactical planning as opposed to subsequent representations of the terrain of campaigns.[112]

The clearest example of the latter is provided by the *situs depicti* (maps?) which Corbulo sent back from the Caucasus, and which according to Pliny the Elder misdescribed the Caucasian Gates (the Pass of Dariel) as the 'Caspian Gates'.[113] Pliny's *Natural History* indeed lists a number of occasions on which increased geographical knowledge had resulted from rather than preceded military operations. Thus Aelius Gallus' Arabian expedition – precisely a case where routes and distances had *not* been explored in advance – produced a report on the population and economy of Arabia Felix (vi, 160–1); the Baltic was first explored by a Roman fleet under Augustus (ii, 167); Suetonius Paulinus reported on the Atlas region and beyond after his operations in 41/2 (v, 11–15); and Corbulo and Licinius Mucianus managed to produce divergent views on the source of the Euphrates (v, 83).

Of course we have a number of geographical and ethnographical descriptions of large areas beyond the Empire, for instance Strabo on Germany,[114] Pliny the Elder on the Parthian Empire,[115] Ammianus on the Persian Empire[116] or, perhaps the most significant of all, Tacitus' *Germania*. Its importance for us lies in the combination of its relevance to military relations between the Empire and the German tribes ('tam diu Germania vincitur', 37, 2) with its dependence on earlier literary sources, only occasionally supplemented by contemporary episodes (8: Veleda: 29: the *agri decumates*; 33: massacre of Bructeri; 37: recent campaigns). Indeed all the writers mentioned depended on literary sources of varying dates: Pliny finds it necessary to explain that what he says on Central Asia will differ from what has been said be earlier writers, since he has gained information 'from the recent operations conducted by Domitius Corbulo and from kings sent thence as suppliants or royal children as hostages'.[117]

In default of any formal archives relating to external policy, for which we have no specific evidence at all, or of an active pursuit of intelligence, which seems to have been operated only (at best) when a Roman expedition was in prospect, any supplementation of the common stock of notions about the world beyond the frontiers would thus tend to come either in the wake of military operations or as a product of the ceaseless diplomatic traffic of suppliants, hostages and embassies. Thus under Claudius an embassy came from a king in Ceylon, and delivered information about the location, geography and topography of the island.[118] Round the fringes of the Empire itself such diplomatic traffic was intense, and its scale and importance cannot be explored here. Apart from examples already given,[119] one of the papyri from Dura-Europos (*P. Dura* 60B) happens to reveal a Parthian envoy on his way to (or from) Severus and Caracalla in about 208. Similarly Pliny sent on to Trajan in Rome a letter-carrier (*tabellarius*) from king Sauromates of the Bosporus, giving him a *diploma* on the grounds that the king had written to say that the information which the man carried was urgent. An embassy from the Bosporus, en route simultaneously, was pursuing a more leisurely course.[120] It is important to stress that the requests, accusations, self-justifications or reports which flowed

[112] This conclusion seems to me to emerge from the survey by R. K. Sherk, 'Roman Geographical Exploration and Military Maps', *ANRW* ii. 1 (1974), 534. Note also the suggestion by Rivet and Smith, op. cit. (note 103), 196–7 that for N. Britain the Ravenna Cosmographer was using a map with ethnic and place names revised as a result of Severus' campaigns of 208–11.

[113] Pliny, *NH* vi, 40.

[114] *Geog.* vii, 1, 2–3, 1 (290–5).

[115] *NH* vi, 112–41.

[116] xxiii, 6.

[117] *NH* vi, 23.

[118] ibid. vi, 84–8.

[119] pp. 4, 11–12 above.

[120] Pliny, *Epp.* x, 63–4; 67.

in to the Emperor through such diplomatic traffic all emanated from interested parties, attempting to gain the help or protection of the Emperor. The more quickly the Emperor felt obliged to act, the more limited would be the choices open to him. In the early Empire a full examination of rights and wrongs might involve the conflicting parties, or their emissaries, travelling to appear before the Emperor in Rome. So for instance the complex issues and mutual accusations as between Herod of Judaea and Aretas of Nabataea, in which either or both kings might have been deposed, were finally resolved in a hearing before Augustus in about 8–7 B.C. at which Nicolaus of Damascus spoke.[121] By the fourth century the more characteristic pattern was the direct control of military and diplomatic affairs by the Emperor in the field, which has already been discussed.

Thus the burden of proof must rest on those who would claim that Emperors both could and did draw on systematic sources of up-to-date information from beyond the frontiers. Caracalla could write to the Senate in about 215 to say that strife between the two claimants to the Parthian throne was of great advantage to the Roman state;[122] but neither he nor his successors, Elagabal and Severus Alexander, had any means of anticipating that the Parthian empire was about to collapse, and that a new Persian dynasty would arise which would fundamentally alter the level of conflict on the Eastern frontier. Similarly, Julian brushed aside the suggestion made in 362 by his advisers, that he should attack the Goths, saying that he sought 'better enemies' (the Persians). It was perhaps at the same moment that he contemptuously told an embassy of Goths to look to arms if they wished to alter the terms of their treaty.[123] If he in fact anticipated a serious movement on their part, as Eunapius alleges,[124] he did not act on it, preferring the supposed greater glory of a Persian war. There was no mechanism for securing advance warning of the movements of the Huns in the following years or of their impact on the Goths, until the latter and other peoples living north of the Danube sent embassies in the mid-370s asking to be allowed to cross the river and settle in Roman territory.[125] The vivid excursus on the Huns with which Ammianus introduces this major event is the first significant account of them in Graeco-Roman literature,[126] and was of course written at least a decade after the disaster of Hadrianople.

Thus what A. Alföldi once called 'the moral barrier on Rhine and Danube'[127] seems to have been an information barrier also. But it was so partly because of one element in the conceptual framework within which the educated inhabitants of the Empire saw their world. There is ample evidence to suggest that after the great expansion of the Augustan period people regarded the Empire as a coherent geographical and strategic entity bounded by the three great rivers, Rhine, Danube and Euphrates.[128] A conflict thus arose between that conception and the long tradition and ideology of continuing conquest.[129] When in Fronto's words 'the *imperium* of the Roman People was extended by the Emperor Trajan beyond the hostile rivers',[130] Florus could rejoice that the Empire had found its youth again, and Tacitus could complain of the inertia of earlier Emperors in terms which strikingly recall the content

[121] Josephus, *Ant.* xvi, 10, 8–9 (335–55).
[122] Dio lxxvii, 12, 2a–3 (387).
[123] Ammianus xxii, 7, 8; Libanius, *Or.* xii, 78.
[124] Eunapius, *Fr.* 22. 1 (*FHG* iv, p. 23).
[125] Ammianus xxxi, 1–4; Eunapius, *Fr.* 42 (*FHG* iv, pp. 31–3).
[126] xxxi, 2: cf. Eunapius, *Fr.* 41 (*FHG* iv, 30); Zosimus iv, 20.
[127] *The Congress of Roman Frontier Studies 1949*, ed. E. Birley (1952), 1.
[128] See e.g. Josephus, *BJ* ii, 16, 4 (363; 377); Statius, *Silv.* v, 1, 89–90; Tacitus, *Ann*, i, 9, iv, 5. For the function of the Euphrates as a symbolic frontier see e.g. Strabo xvi, 1, 28 (748); Velleius ii, 101; Suetonius, *Cal.* 14; Josephus, *BJ* vii, 5, 2 (105); *Ant.* xviii, 4, 5, (101–2); Dio lix, 27, 3. For the Danube see p. 8 above.
[129] For a good collection of the evidence see P. A. Brunt, 'Laus Imperii', in P. D. A. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker (eds.), *Imperialism in the Ancient World* (1978), 159.
[130] Fronto, *Princ. Hist.* 4.

of the poem on the Dacian war which Pliny's friend Caninius Rebilus composed in Comum.[131] Yet the three new provinces beyond the Euphrates could be given up by Hadrian with only relatively mild hostile comment from our sources: according to the *Historia Augusta* he justified this step by quoting the Elder Cato on the difficulty of holding Macedonia as a province.[132] It could even be reported that he had also thought of giving up Dacia beyond the Danube, and been restrained by his *amici*, who urged him not to betray the Roman citizens who had immigrated to it.[133]

When Appian began writing his *Roman History* under Antoninus Pius he still thought of the boundaries as Euphrates, Danube and Rhine, with the Upper German territories beyond the Rhine, and Dacia as mere additions: 'but going beyond these rivers in places they rule some of the Celts over the Rhine, and the Getae over the Danube, whom they call Dacians.'[134] The concept of the Empire as a stable defensive system based on an outer ring of fixed camps is clearly present in Aristides' *Roman Oration* (80–4) and persists in Herodian, writing a century later, when it was rapidly ceasing to be appropriate: 'Augustus ... fortified the Empire by hedging it around with major obstacles, rivers and trenches and mountains and deserted areas which were difficult to traverse.'[135]

This concept became out of date in two ways. Dacia had been taken by Trajan, and involvement beyond the Euphrates was resumed, with uncertain results, under Marcus and Verus, and reached a decisive stage under Severus. The subsequent fates of these two areas form an instructive contrast. Dacia was finally abandoned in the early 270s, but our sources barely notice the fact.[136] Moreover, writers of the later third and fourth centuries again tend to treat the Danube as the established frontier of the Empire, with no hint that there had once been a substantial provincial area beyond it.[137] Not only that, but historians of the fourth century and after – including Eutropius who had actually recorded the abandonment of Dacia – describe the treaty by which Jovian gave up Nisibis, Singara and five districts across the Tigris, as a disgrace which had never occurred before in the history of Rome.[138] The pre-eminence of Eastern wars was deeply rooted in Graeco-Roman culture and was concretely embodied in the strategic priorities chosen by Emperors. There, but not elsewhere, the view of Septimius Severus had long triumphed over that of Dio.

6. *Conclusion*

This sketch of some issues relating to the way frontier and foreign policy was conducted by the Imperial monarchy cannot by its nature even suggest firm conclusions. Given the haphazard nature of our literary evidence, arguments from silence must always be fragile. They may none the less serve the purpose of preventing the interpretation of archaeological evidence in the light of naive assumptions as to information, communication and responsibility. Even where archaeological evidence of the alignment of frontiers, the siting of camps or the building of roads seems clearly to demonstrate the operation of coherent plans based on good geographical

[131] Florus, *Epit. praef.*; Tacitus, *Ann.* iv, 32; cf. Pliny, *Ep.* viii, 4.

[132] Fronto, *Princ. Hist.* 10; Eutropius vii, 6, 2; Festus, *Brev.* 14; 20; *v. Had.* 5, 3.

[133] Eutropius loc. cit. (Fronto. loc. cit., (note 132), appears to say that Hadrian gave up Dacia).

[134] Appian, *Praef.* 4/14–15. cf. Pausanias i, 9, 5, for very similar conceptions.

[135] Herodian ii, 11, 5, Loeb. trans.

[136] The few lines of Eutropius, ix, 15, 1 represent the fullest account of the abandonment, and the creation of Dacia Ripensis south of the river, Reated in *HA*, *v. Aurel.* 39, 7. cf. Festus, *Brev.* 8. See. H. Vetters, *Dacia Ripensis* (1950).

[137] cf. p. 11 above (crossing by Goths); *Pan.* ii (10) ed. Galletier, 2, 6; iii (11), 6, 6. Note *Pan.* iv (8), 3, 3: 'Dacia restituta', referring to Dacia Ripensis. Anon. Vales. i, 135/13 on the origin of Licinius 'ex nova Dacia' in an implicit allusion to the old province.

[138] Eutropius ix, 17, 1–2; Festus, *Brev.* 29; Ammianus xxv, 7; Zosimus iii, 31–2.

knowledge, we must still ask whose knowledge, and whose plans. What this paper can do, therefore, is to focus attention on some issues and to put forward some tentative propositions which, if they prove on further examination to be valid, will have some relevance to how we understand the Empire as a system, and the choices made within it in relation to other peoples.

1. These choices have to be seen in the light of the culture (in both the broad and the more specific sense) of the Graeco-Roman world, whether this be in the use of historical precedents and models, in the types of training for warfare which the upper class received, or in contrasting attitudes to the northern barbarians and to Parthia or Persia. For what it is worth, it may be noted that the explicitly military literature of the Empire is either concerned to deploy precedents from existing narrative histories, or is tactical rather than strategic in character, or both.[139] The surviving literature from the first four centuries of the Empire provides nothing remotely comparable to the strategic-diplomatic manual which Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote for his son in about 950.[140]

2. The types of decision which could be made must have been limited by the character of the information available, both on a longer- and short-term basis. It is perhaps significant that one subject on which our literary sources, at least those of the early Empire, provide relatively clear and concrete information is the number and positioning of the legions (and to a much lesser extent the auxiliaries). The transfer of legions from province to province, and the raising of new ones were clearly essential elements in the types of strategic decision-making open to Emperors.[141]

3. The character of the bulk of the short-term information reaching the Emperor must have depended on the interests and objectives of persons (mainly individual rulers – or would-be rulers) beyond the Empire, or on the presumptions of governors or military commanders on the frontiers.

4. How the Empire *could* respond to any perceived necessity on the frontiers will have been determined first by the degree of initiative allowed to commanders in the area, and the extent to which they operated within the explicit terms or unspoken general assumptions of any Imperial 'grand strategy'.

5. In so far as decisions were held to be required at the centre, i.e. by the Emperor, it is essential to remember the crude fact that the Emperor could be aware of nothing beyond the reach of his own eyes except what someone wished or felt obliged to tell him. With all communications made to him we have to recall constantly the controlling factors of space and time, that is the delays of up to some two months before a messenger could reach him, and up to a further two months for the return journey to the area concerned; and the much longer delays certainly involved in the journeys of ambassadors from beyond the Empire.

6. Even more important, it is essential to envisage the military-diplomatic relations of the Empire not so much in geographical or even ethnographical terms but as networks of relation-

[139] e.g. Onasander, *Strategemeta*; Frontinus, *Strategemata*; Arrian, *Techne Taktike* see F. Kiechle, 'Die "Taktik" des Flavius Arrianus', *45. Ber., Röm-Germ. Kom. 1964* (1965), 87; Arrian, *Ektaxis*, see A. B. Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani', *HSCPh* lxxxi (1977), 217, esp. 232–55, and cf. P. A. Stadter, *Arrian of Nicomedia* (1980), 41–9; Polyaenus, *Strategemata* (addressed to Marcus Aurelius and Verus). The anonymous *de rebus bellicis* (see the new text and discussions, ed. by M. W. C. Hassall and R. I. Ireland, BAR Int. Ser. 63, 1979), is of course more original, being concerned with practical measures for the defence of a static frontier.

[140] Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *de Administrando*, ed., trans., com. G. Moravcsik, R. J. H. Jenkins, i–ii (1949–62). For its importance as a source of ethnographical information on the area north of the Black Sea see D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* (1971), esp. 24 f.

[141] See Josephus, *BJ* ii, 16, 4 (345–401), the speech of Agrippa II; Suetonius, *Vesp.* 8; Tacitus, *Ann.* iv, 5; *Hist.* i, 8–11; ii, 81. Note esp. Dio lv, 23–4 on the positioning of (*a*) those legions which had existed under Augustus and were still in service, and (*b*) those raised by successive later Emperors. It will be recalled (p. 4 above) that according to Suetonius, *Tib.* 30, Tiberius used to consult the Senate 'de legendo vel exauctorando milite ac legionum et auxiliorum discriptione'.

ships partly created by symbolic acts (the sending of hostages, exchanges of gifts, the grant of crowns) and by verbal exchanges, conducted on the Roman side by governors and local commanders, but above all by the Emperor in person. It may be worth noting that Gaius gives as the prime example of an obligation valid for a *peregrinus* the occasion when *imperator noster* formally asks the *princeps* of some foreign *populus* 'pacem futuram spondes?[142]

7. In accordance with the long-established traditions of Roman public life the position of Emperor was from the beginning both civil and military. It is also clear that those Emperors of the first century and a half who had no established military reputation actively sought major campaigns while they were on the throne. Yet a qualitative change seems to occur in the middle of the second century, in terms of which, from then until the end of the fourth, it is assumed that all major campaigns, defensive or offensive, require direct command by the (or an) Emperor in person.

8. This assumption led directly to the need for a multiplication of Emperors, and thus to the Tetrarchy, the complex co-Emperorships of *Augusti* and *Caesares* in the fourth century, and ultimately to the division of the Empire in the fifth.

9. It cannot be specifically proved – and therefore should not be assumed – that an Emperor, whether receiving embassies in Rome or replying to messages from provincial governors, or (progressively) taking command in the field himself and confronting barbarian chiefs or delegations or Persian emissaries while on campaign, had access to privileged archives of information in strategic matters, or that he had any advice on which to draw except that provided by the *amici*, *comites* or *consistoriani* whom he consulted, but by whom he could not be bound.

10. For these reasons the Emperor's strategic choices and orders and the replies which he made in formal verbal exchanges with foreign embassies could only be determined by the general values of Graeco-Roman culture, of which he himself was a product. When that culture changed, as with the victory of Christianity, so did some of the values which informed foreign relations; Constantine's letter to Shapur II is perhaps the first symbol of that.

11. Of all the fundamental choices made, the most significant was the occupation of Mesopotamia and the readiness to fight repeated wars for it. Trajan's brief conquest marked not an end but a beginning, and it was here that the ethos of imperialism had its most lasting effects. Plotinus may have been quite misguided (or is it we?) in thinking that if he joined Gordian III's Persian expedition he might make contact with the philosophers not only of Persia but of India.[143] But most Emperors also implicitly agreed with Julian, that the Persians were the 'better enemies'.

To illustrate the concrete conditions of Imperial rule to which these developments led – and to exhibit the counter-example of an Emperor who did *not* prefer the Eastern front – it may be useful in conclusion to sketch the movements and military preoccupations of Valentinian I, as portrayed in Ammianus' narrative. He came to the throne in 364 by the choice of the Imperial entourage on the march through Bithynia, and once he had reached Constantinople appointed his brother Valens as joint *Augustus*. The brothers marched west, and at Naissus divided their accompanying *comites* and *magistri*, and then, after moving on to Sirmium, separated, Valentinian going to Milan and Valens back to Constantinople. In Gaul later in the year Valentinian hesitated between staying to confront an Alamannic invasion and returning to protect Pannonia against the pretender Procopius; he finally followed the view of the majority of his advisers and the pleas of embassies from the Gallic cities and stayed in Gaul (xxvi, 5. 9–13). There he remained for nearly a decade, repeatedly engaged in campaigns on the Rhine, mainly against the Alamanni, writing to the kings of the Burgundii to

[142] Gaius, *Inst.* iii, 94.
[143] Porphyry, *v. Plot.* 3.

invoke their aid (xxviii, 5, 10) and making the last crossing of the Rhine by a Roman Emperor (xxix, 4, 1–6). He was building a fort near Basel in 374 when a letter arrived from Petronius Probus, Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum, reporting raids by the Quadi and Sarmatians on Pannonia. The *notarius* Paternianus was sent to investigate, and sent back reports to confirm. Valentinian was eager to set out at once on the considerable march to Pannonia (Ammianus elsewhere shows Constantius II at Sirmium as being 40 stages' march from Argentorate).[144] But his advisers persuaded him to wait for the spring, when supplies would be available, and to make peace with the Alamanni first. As we saw before (p. 15 above), he did so by negotiating from a boat in the Rhine with King Macrianus standing on the bank, and then returned to Trier. In the spring of 375 he marched from Trier to Carnuntum, and then after three months moved to Aquincum, finally settling for the winter at Brigetio (xxx, 5). There ambassadors from the Quadi appeared and were granted a treaty. But when admitted into the *consistorium* they were too ready to excuse their previous conduct. The Emperor was enraged, suffered a fit of apoplexy and died shortly after (xxx, 6).

The story exemplifies perfectly the constraining factors of time, distance and information within which an Emperor, like anyone else, had to operate. Its ending also illustrates the irreducibly personal character of the combined management of war and diplomacy. We are still a long way from explaining why these responsibilities pressed over more heavily on the Emperor in person. But granted the fact of that development over the previous four centuries – the opposite of what we might have presumed in an immense, relatively stable and highly civilized empire – Valentinian's apoplexy at least is wholly intelligible.

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[144] xvi, 12, 70.